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JEWISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

MR. STOPFORD BROOKE, in his recent essay upon Keltic literature, says, "I hold that the self-reverence, self-knowledge, and self-control of any people, that its continuous life, its power to unite, to create, and to inspire, its influence for good on mankind, depend on its preserving and jealously guarding its distinctive nationality. The more individual it is, the more it will be able to minister to the progress of all nations, of all mankind." These words, in our view, give the keynote to what we consider should be the "motive" of any system of Jewish religious education—the preservation of the distinct individuality of Judaism.

Of course an objection will at once be urged, "Surely you are making the subsidiary part of the Jewish religion its principal part. You are making Jewish particularism the essence of Judaism, and forgetting altogether its great dogma of the Unity of God, and regarding its ethics as a matter of comparative unimportance."

At first sight the objection seems to be a strong one, but it really is not valid. We wish to preserve Judaism, and we are mystical enough to feel with the Bible that God chose us as his "peculiar possession," and that it is the Divine Will that we should remain apart, for reasons we cannot fully understand or sufficiently explain. God has a work in store for us, and we must ever be prepared as a regiment of soldiers to answer the divine command when it is given to us.

We believe in the ethics of Judaism; we believe that religion without ethics is a blasphemy of God's name. A man who puts on his Tephillin, and afterwards is guilty of an act of fraud; who abstains from forbidden food and

eschews not impurity—profanes the name of God. But still we cannot admit that its ethics are the distinguishing characteristic of our faith ; for this would mean that noble types of character are the product of Judaism and of Judaism only ; that none but us do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

This is clearly not the case. I suppose that the most orthodox amongst us would at once admit that it would be quite possible for even one of his own sons to be educated as a good man even if he were taught morality by the professor of another faith. Take the Roman Catholic Church. Its dogmas are most utterly opposed to our own. But surely a Church which could produce a Father Damien, or which could count amongst its adherents one so sincere, so spiritual, so unselfish as John Henry Newman, cannot be regarded as unethical.

We think that when the question is examined closely, when we come to ask ourselves conscientiously why we wish Judaism to be preserved, we shall find that the ethical reason is not the only one ; and we are bold enough to think not even the main one. Where do Christian ethics differ from Jewish ethics ? Perhaps only in this. Christianity looks more to an after life as a motive towards righteousness, Judaism less. In the Talmud, as is natural, there are more passages bearing upon eternity for the individual soul than there are in the Bible ; but these passages are not prominently brought forward by our teachers and preachers, and certainly do not weigh so much as they might with the Jew as a sanction for his moral conduct. But in ethical acts themselves wherein lies the difference ? May a Christian lie ; is he not taught to love his neighbour as himself ; do not Christian children honour their parents ; do not Christian parents deny themselves many a luxury to give their children a good education ; is there no benevolence amongst them ; are they not taught to forgive injuries even as we are ? Where then lies the ethical distinction ? Do we consider apostasy the greatest misfortune which

could befall our children because we think that they would be forsaking a religion which was ethically good for one which was ethically bad ?

Nor are we Jews peculiar in this. The Nonconformists laid stress upon the "Conscience clause" in the Education Act; but surely no Nonconformist thought that his own particular form of dissent was ethically better than that of another Nonconformist; nor did he think that it was better than the religion of an Evangelical Churchman, and probably not better than the faith of the High-churchman or even of the Catholic.

We acknowledge with our prayer-book the goodliness of our portion, the pleasantness of our lot, the beauty of our heritage, because we early and late, morning and evening, every day declare "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one;" but even the belief in the Unity of God is not the sole reason why we wish to remain Jews, and why we wish our posterity after us to remain Jews. The most orthodox Trinitarian would tell us that he is a Monotheist, and he might add that the Tritheist Arian is doomed to eternal damnation. The present-day Socinian or Unitarian certainly calls himself a Monotheist. We cannot admit that Trinitarianism is not a contradiction to the doctrine of the divine Unity, and we believe that modern Socinianism is always shifting its ground, and is not decidedly Unitarian; but surely Islam teaches that there is no God but the One God, even as our religion teaches. Some time ago there were published in this REVIEW certain passages from the creed of the Moslem sect which persecuted our fathers in Spain. The belief in God's Unity was taught by Ibn Tumart with complete unambiguity, with absolute decisiveness. Yet if we were living in Morocco or in India we should consider conversion to Islam to be an apostasy as great as we consider here conversion to Christianity. It is not then merely on account of dogma that we wish to retain our children as Jews. It

is not, as we have shown, merely on account of ethics. If a Jewish preacher became a Catholic or Buddhist priest, a Moslem imam, or a Wesleyan minister, it would be the colouring rather than the substance of his ethical sermons that he would be obliged to alter.

Why then do we desire that our children should remain Jews? Of course there are many parents who never think of the question at all, and who are attached to Judaism merely from racial instincts, or from prejudice, or better still from a feeling of piety towards their own parents. We have no sympathy with those who would wish their children to remain Jews because they look upon the Jewish race as smarter and shrewder than other races; but we do feel that we wish them to remain Jews because it is God's will that all of us who are born Jews should be faithful to his covenant with our fathers. We admit that in a deep sense God "has not placed us like other families of the earth, that he hath not assigned unto us a portion as unto them, nor a lot as unto all their multitude." Why not? we cannot fully tell; God's thoughts are not our thoughts. May be that the great dogma of his unity will be best preserved by a distinct people selected for preserving it. There may even be ethical reasons we cannot fully discern. We are but like children groping in the dark, or with a glimmering light. But we acknowledge the fact of God's voice to us. The reasons for it may be difficult for us to find, but we do not doubt that there are reasons. Because there are difficulties, we do not doubt. We find it sometimes difficult to believe in the existence of God, but we do not doubt his existence. We find it sometimes difficult to believe that God chose us from amongst all nations, but we do not doubt it. We acknowledge the fact, and we consider it a duty of love to order our lives and educate our children in accordance with that fact.

What form should Jewish religious education take, what should be its method? The education should certainly be

ethical and spiritual, but we should not consider that a child will grow up to be a good Jew, faithful to Judaism, because he has learnt by heart certain beautiful verses selected from the Bible. The knowledge of such verses is useful when men of other faiths tell him that his religion is merely "national" or "ancestral," merely a "bundle of ceremonies"; the knowledge of them is useful to preserve him from the belief that man need but tread God's courts, stretch forth his hands in prayer, bow down his head as a bulrush, fast and afflict himself, in order to deserve the divine favour; but in and by themselves they do not cover Judaism; the knowledge of them alone will not preserve a Jew from apostasy, from entering into a marriage contract outside his faith, from faithlessness to Israel.

We may be considered old-fashioned, but we are strongly of opinion that it is only on the old-fashioned lines that Judaism can be preserved. The methods *must* be improved—but there is only one road by which a Jew can learn to love his faith. He must know the traditions of his faith not merely as a matter of antiquarian information; he must see them in his home from his childhood; he must be taught their significance by his teachers. He must learn Hebrew, not merely once or twice a week, but every day, for he must learn it sufficiently well to understand his prayers in the sacred tongue, and to follow the readings from the Bible in the Synagogue. This end is attained in our Jewish Denominational Schools, or in the Board Schools where opportunities are given to Jewish pupils to learn Hebrew. Moreover, the poorer Jewish parents would be content with nothing less. Judaism is safe therefore in their hands, for they are seriously in earnest.

What the poorer classes insist upon having, and therefore succeed in having, the middle and wealthier classes amongst us, if they are in earnest, must also insist upon. We cannot help thinking that Jews who have wealth are not so firm in the faith as wealthy members of some other Churches are firm in theirs. The question of Roman Catholic education

has long been solved. The children of the Catholic aristocracy in England are as well taught (perhaps better taught) the doctrines and practices of Catholicism, as the poorest child. Not so with us. The little Jewish boy in Whitechapel could put to shame in his Hebrew knowledge the child of the wealthiest Jewish inhabitant of some fashionable London square.

We should like to see a Jewish "Stonyhurst." This is probably but a "pious wish." It is said by some of the most orthodox to be impracticable. We do not believe that there is one member of the Committee of our large denominational schools who would accept for his own children that which he pleads as being necessary for the poor. This is almost grotesquely inconsistent, but we must accept the inconsistency. We cannot regard the inconsistency as non-existent. Perhaps, too, we have not a sufficient number of men amongst us enthusiastic enough, well educated enough, both in Jewish and secular learning, to undertake the higher education of our sons, but something less than a "Stonyhurst" might be attempted. Daily religious classes might be formed in each district where there were sufficient Jews to attend them. We say this although we know that classes outside the ordinary school curriculum will always be regarded as a burden by the child. The Sunday religious classes in connection with each synagogue are useful in awakening a little interest in the congregation, but one hour a week for eight or nine months of the year is absurdly little, and we fear that the children who attend them most regularly and do the best work at the examinations are those who least need them, as they receive their real religious education in their homes. The children of the laxer parents seldom receive benefit from them, for the contradiction between the home and the class is so glaring that indifference in the pupil's mind, or something worse even than indifference, must be the result.

When we Jews lived together and mixed little with the

big outside world, public opinion, backed by the terrors of social sanction, visited disregard of the obligations of Judaism with profound disapproval. We need now more than ever, since old barriers between citizens of the same state are breaking down, a public opinion to support us—a public opinion which will look upon a disregard of the great ordinances of Judaism as cowardice, as want of chivalry to those who are nearest to us, as an act of disloyalty to ancestry and to faith.

We trust that we have made our meaning clear as to the tendency which we think that Jewish religious education should take. It will be seen that we have no sympathy whatever with the demand for the “Anglicization” of Judaism, or its “Gallicization,” or “Germanization.” We regard such a Judaism as narrow and provincial, and inevitably leading outside the community of Israel. We think that the synagogue service might be improved, that there are passages in the prayer-book which might well be expunged. We do not think that absolute uniformity is necessary, but we hold that the diversity should not be so great that the child who is taught that there is one Judaism, should be unable to recognise one synagogue service in another synagogue service.

To prevent error, let us once more urge the essential importance of moral religious teaching, based upon a belief in God, his love and his anger; but let us add that we think it a calumny to assume that all the so-called “higher Judaism” is the property of the laxer Jew. There is in fact no “higher,” as there is no “lower” Judaism. Judaism is made up of three elements indissolubly connected—its dogma, its ethics, its individual and distinctive character. In the good Jew no one of these elements must be placed in the background.

Just as in Wales there is a love for the Keltic language, just as in Belgium there is a revival in the study of Flemish, as in Bohemia it is regarded as a point of honour to be acquainted with the Czech, so amongst us it must be

regarded as a disgrace and a shame not to know Hebrew, to know naught of, or to set aside Jewish traditions. We must be willing to bear the accusation of exclusiveness. Our law has commanded us to be "set apart." Of course "progress" is a sign of life, but progress should consist in "development" and not in "destruction." We fear that the worship of "progress" is with many of us a superstitious cult. Many of us make a fetish of it. In fine we may sum up in the words we have already quoted, "The more individual" Judaism "is, the more it will be able to minister to the progress of all nations, of all mankind."

E. HARRIS.

L. M. SIMMONS.